

From: Roy Seneca/R3/USEPA/US
Sent: 5/11/2012 1:38:34 PM

To: Shawn Garvin/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; William Early/R3/USEPA/US; Daniel Ryan/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Richard Sumter/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Michael Kulik/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Terri-A White/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Catherine Libertz/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; David Bloomgren/DC/USEPA/US@EPA; Dennis Carney/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Kathy Hodgkiss/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Ron Borsellino/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Jacqueline Guerry/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Joan Schafer/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Helen Duteau/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Trish Taylor/R3/USEPA/US; David Polish/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Richard Rupert/ESC/R3/USEPA/US; Fetzler.Richard@epamail.epa.gov; Gerald Heston/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Fran Burns/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Humane Zia/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Heather Gray/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Cecil Rodrigues/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Victoria Binetti/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; David Sternberg/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; Bonnie Smith/R3/USEPA/US; Kelley Chase/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; capacasa.jon@epa.gov; KarenD Johnson/R3/USEPA/US@EPA; William Arguto/R3/USEPA/US@EPA

CC:
Subject: Associated Press (5-11) EPA says well water in northeastern Pa. gas drilling town is safe; residents dispute assertion

EPA says well water in northeastern Pa. gas drilling town is safe; residents dispute assertion

By Associated Press, Updated: Friday, May 11, 1:10 PM

ALLENTOWN, Pa. — Federal environmental regulators say testing of scores of drinking-water wells in a northeastern Pennsylvania village has failed to show unsafe levels of contamination, a blow to residents who assert a gas driller tainted their water supply with hazardous chemicals nearly four years ago.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released test results for an additional 12 homes on Friday and said they “did not show levels of contaminants that would give EPA reason to take further action.” It was the fourth and final release of data for homes in Dimock, a rural Susquehanna County community that’s found itself in the middle of a passionate debate over the safety of drilling and hydraulic fracturing in deep rock formations like the Marcellus Shale.

The EPA testing is only a snapshot of the highly changeable aquifer and will not be the final word on the health of the water supply. But pro-industry groups and Cabot Oil & Gas Corp., the Houston-based driller whose faulty gas wells were previously found to have leaked methane into the aquifer, assert the test results justify their position that Dimock’s water is safe.

Residents who are suing Cabot and anti-drilling activists accuse EPA of misrepresenting the data.

EPA spokesman Roy Seneca defended the quality of the testing Friday, saying “the agency has used the best available scientific data to provide clarity to Dimock residents and address their concerns about the safety of their drinking water.”

EPA sampled the well water of a total of 61 homes, though it released data on only 59 because regulators were unable to contact two of the homeowners. The agency said it will resample four wells where earlier testing by Cabot and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection showed unsafe levels of contaminants. EPA is also planning to follow up with an additional three homeowners who also want their wells tested.

“Once all of the sample results are complete, we will conduct a comprehensive review to determine if there are any trends or patterns in the data as it relates to home well water quality,” Seneca said.

Meanwhile, the Dimock plaintiffs, who sued Cabot in 2009, appear to have entered into settlement talks with the company. One of their lawyers, Tate Kunkle, mentioned “progressing settlement negotiations” in a court filing late last month.

State environmental regulators previously determined that Cabot contaminated the aquifer underneath homes along Carter Road in Dimock with explosive levels of methane gas, although they later determined the company had met its obligations under a consent agreement and allowed Cabot to stop delivering bulk and bottled water last fall.

The EPA said Friday one of the 12 water wells was found to have an elevated level of methane. The agency notified the homeowner, state officials and the Susquehanna County Emergency Management Agency.

Roy Seneca

EPA Region 3 Press Officer
Office of Public Affairs
seneca.roy@epa.gov
(215) 814-5567